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THE DECORATOR AND FURNISHER.

A TIFFIN WITH A TAOTAI.

BY EDWARD BEDLOE.



ARRIVING at the residence of the host you send in your card. In a moment an official appears at the gate to bid you welcome, and at the same second a salute of three guns is fired from within the *yamen*. You enter the outer gate with your retinue, passing the second gate, where you descend from the sedan-chair, arrange your dress, and, passing the inner gate with the official, enter the interior of the palace.

Here you are met by the Taotai or high Chinese official who displays the greatest joy at your arrival, and leading you into the reception room, presents you to whatever guests may have assembled.

The Taotai is usually a man about forty five, well-bred, fine looking, and having or assuming the scholarly appearance which the Celestial regards as the highest type of manly beauty. He wears at least three coats, of which the inner one is snow white and the outer is a fine blue silk reaching from the neck to the ankles. Over it is a silk vest, embroidered or brocaded in dark blue, olive, old gold or black.

The dining hall is exquisitely sweet and clean, and, although very different from what prevails at home, is very beautiful and striking. From the ceiling, high and well ventilated, hang lanterns of various shapes and colors. Some are glass and silver, with the crystal covered with painted flowers and figures, and the metal chased into geometrical or grotesque designs. Others are practically ground glass boxes, on which are inscribed in deep blue letters, quotations from the great poets, or maxims from the philosophers. In the centre is a good American Rochester lamp, by which all the nightly reading and writing of the place are done.

Around the room against the walls are high arm chairs and narrow tea-tables in groups of two chairs to the table. They are made of the finest ebony or teak, and are decorated with inlaid work in mother-of-pearl, ivory and silver. Over the mantel is a great painting of Quang-tai Gong, or the Divine Spirit, framed so as to give the impression that the figure is sitting within a beautiful temple. Before it on the mantel-piece are fine dishes and vases of silver and bronze for the reception of joss sticks, prayer papers, votive candles, and other paraphernalia of the oriental worship. Here and there are heavy, handsome vases and urns; and in one corner is a trophy of arms and armor from some dead century.

The floor is teak, scrubbed, oiled and polished until it gleams like a black mirror. Large screens, with wood hand-carved and spaces filled with gold embroideries, enable the inmates of the apartment to shut out draughts, or to form small committee rooms for two or three desiring temporary privacy.

A few heavy rugs from New-Chwang, or Tien-Tsin, clumsy and coarse but soft and pleasing, give rest to the eye, if not to the feet. The Chinese use them as a safeguard against dust for the dress of those whom etiquette obliges to kneel to their superiors.

The dinner accommodations are very simple. Sometimes one table large enough for all present is employed; at other times tables for four or five covers are arranged about the room; and at still other times one large table and many smaller ones are used.

The chairs are armchairs, and are made of ebony or teak, as are the tables. To each guest two or more waiters are assigned, one of whom keeps a lighted pipe in constant readiness for use. The furniture of the table is devoid of artistic display. There is neither table cloth nor napkin, goblet, caster, salt-cellar, knife nor fork. In front of each convive is a pretty pair of chop sticks. These are narrow rods, shaped something like a penholder, a foot long, and made of ivory, solid silver, or gold. In a half-circle in front of his plate are a set of little cups and saucers. The cups are scarcely larger than thimbles, and might be mistaken for those belonging to the doll sets so common at home. They are used for drinking the native wines and liquors. The average mandarin empties ten of these cups at a meal,—amounting to about as much as a good glass of Burgundy.

Four saucers three inches in diameter, are devoted to sauces, and are filled before you sit down. One sauce is See-Yon, an aromatic brown liquid, suggesting Worcestershire, and used as

we use salt. A second contains what we would call a salad dressing,—a yellow paste made of salt, mustard, oil, vinegar, and a suspicion of wine. A third is *Moi-ta-Ung*, or "sweet-sour sauce," and is made of fruit acids boiled down to almost the consistency of marmalade. A fourth is our friend Indian chutney. The tea-service consists of large porcelain cups which fit into a silver base, a cover and a small cup. The tea leaves are placed in a large cup, which is then filled with boiling water and covered. In two minutes, when the tea is drawn, it is decanted from the large into the small cup, the cover being used to strain off the leaves. These three porcelain pieces are as thin as the flimsiest crystal and ornamented with drawings in gold and colors of mythical heroes, dragons, scenes from life, or fruits and flowers.

Beyond the line of cups and saucers is a profusion of dainty little plates, piled high with different delicacies. Ginger preserved in honey, jellied ginger, crystalized ginger, candied limes, lemons, citrons, dates, figs and bitter oranges, marmalades of guava, pomela, bola, lai-chi, quince, rampuntan, tarts and fine confectionary, are only a few of the list, which never has less than a hundred numbers. In serving the dishes, the practice is to have at least two on the table at the same time, and as far as possible to have them of contrasting flavors.

The number of courses is anywhere between fifty and two hundred, according to the importance of the occasion. The Chinese nobility follow the Romans in one revolting prandial custom, and retire regularly to a vomitorium in order to make room for the next installment of the feast.

Their repast is enlivened by conversation and the pleasant pastime of one friend feeding another.

If you are a guest, the Taotai piles your plate full of food every two minutes, and you in turn should do the same to him. I have a strong impression that at one time I covered a lot of oysters on my host's plate with a quantity of sweetmeats. The official bowed, smiled and ate away as if nothing had happened.

The cooking is admirable, and although utterly unlike anything European, is equal to that of the best kitchen of Paris. Many of the dishes were so simple as to show their composition at a glance. A few of those I recall with very pleasant memories were as follows: (1) Chicken breast cut into dice and stewed with chicken-liver, mushrooms, tree mushrooms, bamboo-tips and wine. The sauce was a revelation of delight, and the dish itself was so carefully prepared that each ingredient had preserved its identity. (2) Devilish crabs. The meat, carefully picked, was laid in the shell, alternating with *mai-tai*, a very delicate vegetable resembling a potato, and mixed with finely chopped bacon, salt and red pepper. It was better than our own mode of making the dish. (3) Goldfish stuffed. The fish is scalded and the scales removed. It is opened, cleaned and stuffed with a paste that is chiefly vegetable in composition, and steamed until thoroughly cooked. It is served with a pale grayish sauce resembling Hollandaise, and decorated with sprigs of cress and other herbs. The contrast of color is very beautiful. (4) Stuffed radishes. They are prepared the same as our stuffed cucumbers, and are baked or steamed. The heat destroys the biting quality of the esculent without injuring its flavor, or when steamed, its color. (5) Dragon balls. These are miniature dragons made of fine pastry filled with forcemeat. They are decorated with primary colors, and stand proudly erected upon their forelegs, or hind legs and tail, like toy dogs. I was puzzled how they kept the legs from coalescing with the body, and was informed that the body was supported on bamboo skewers during the baking operation. (6) Custard eggs. Eggs are emptied through small holes in each end, refilled with liquid custard, plugged and steamed. When broken one is full of rose-colored, rose-flavored custard, another with chocolate, and so on, not more than two being of the same tint and taste. Time and space forbid a longer enumeration. The three great dishes of the Mongolian epicure, birds'-nest soup, sharks' fins and devilfish are household words now a-days at home, and need no further comment than that they make delicious dishes.

One style of dinner decoration common in China was fashionable in France during the *ancien regime*, but is now extinct in Europe. It consists in carefully removing the plumage of birds and the skins of animals, cooking the bodies, and replacing their former integuments so as to look perfectly natural. This is done every day by the Celestial chef, and in the case of pheasants and peacocks, presents some naturally brilliant and beautiful birds.

The table ware is generally worthy of a shelf on a collector's cabinet. For ordinary use a fine hand-painted porcelain dinner service is employed, which differs little if any from what is used

THE DECORATOR AND FURNISHER.

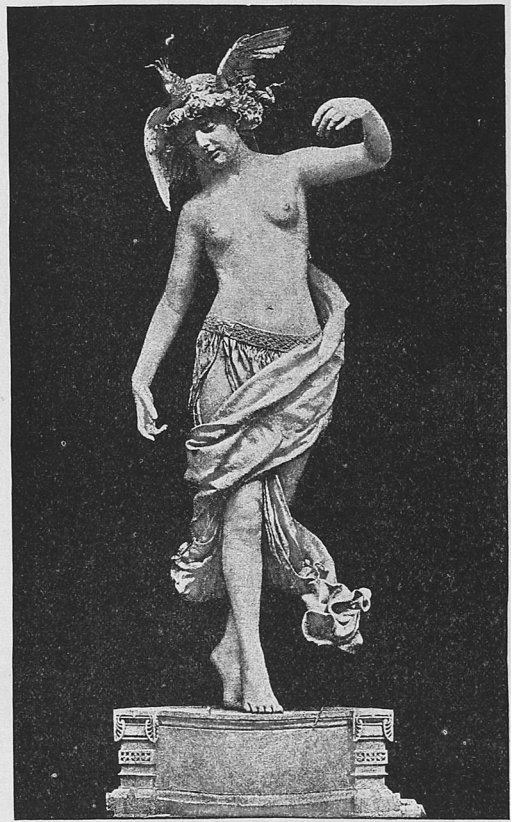
by the wealthy people at home. But at official tiffins and dinners the ceramic treasures of the establishment are made to do duty. Chinese and Japanese cloisonné, delicate crackle ware, pale-tinted and gracefully curved designs from the Ming dynasties, snow-white dishes from the famous potteries of Chau-Chafoo, dark colored and peculiar plates and salvers, which are said to acquire their curious color from being buried in decaying earth, or fathoms under the sea, are among the interesting objects which delight the eye of Oriental and Occidental alike. The desire of many American housekeepers to have the table ware in sets, twelve of a kind, is replaced in China by the more æsthetic idea of endless variety. Everything differs from everything else, style, design, ornament, color and arrangement. Upon the dark background of the ebony table, brightened here and there by a flash of silver and gold inlays, these many colored

Tobacco is as much a king here as at home. The cigar is common, the cigarette universal, but more popular still is the hubble bubble or Chinese water pipe. It is a small metal box, oblong, with round corners, from which rises a long curved tube, terminating in an amber mouthpiece. The box is divided into two compartments,—one with a square lid, which contains a little store of tobacco cut as fine as sewing silk, and the other partially filled with perfumed or fresh water. Into the water dips a hollow metal cylinder, the upper expanded end of which will hold enough tobacco to make two or three whiffs of smoke. These pass through the water and the long tube before reaching the smoker, and are then cool and very mild.

The common herd use pipes of pewter, brass, or bronze, but not the Taotai. His is of sterling silver, plain or chased, of gold polished until you can see your face in every surface, or



MUSIC.



DANCING.

STATUES MADE FOR THE MAHARAJAH OF DURGUNGA, BY ONSLOW FORD. (Magazine of Art, 1890.)

masterpieces of the potter might be mistaken a moment for a tropical garden in full bloom.

The Taotai is a Sybarite worthy of associating with Lucullus and the other epicures of Rome. In a land where rice costs two cents a pound, fresh fish one and one half cents, and vegetables one half and one-quarter of a cent, he thinks nothing of paying two dollars a pound for fine devil fish, three dollars for hand-fattened gold fish, five dollars for the tongues and brains of small birds, six dollars for tiger's liver and young alligators' kidneys, ten to twenty dollars for birds' nests, and fifty dollars for the finest chops of tea. He gives dinners every week whose cost exceeds that of the feast where Cleopatra dissolved the precious pearl in the Roman vinegar.

Europeans never dare to compete with him in that regard. When he attends the official dinner of a legation or flag ship they give him only the best French cooking they can and nothing more.

hammered into repoussé pictures of artistic merit, if not of beauty, or of precious metal inlaid with mother-of-pearl or fine ornamental ivory carvings. The tobacco is lighter and milder than our own, and equally aromatic. As used in these pipes it produces none of these heavy oils, which are so unpleasant to non-smokers and which in our country seem to infest every possible place and provoke popular prejudice.

Conversation at the table of a Chinese gentleman is on a high plane. It is literary, rather than intellectual, reminiscent rather than original. At times it is dry, and even dull, but it is always clean, choice, and elegant. Their classics abound in phrases such as "May good digestion wait on appetite, and health on both;" "Better is a dinner of herbs with contentment than a stalled ox with envy," and the like, which are produced at each and every opportunity with great regularity.

The Taotai is a high member of literary aristocracy or oligarchy, and a literary oligarchy is just as callous, selfish, cruel,



FRESCO DESIGN FOR A LUNETTE, BY PROF. G. STUM.—FROM THE DECORATIVE VORBILDER.

and despotic as plutocracy, or an absolute Czarhood. It is an improvement on these in elegance, courtesy and forms of speech, but in heart and essence it differs from them in no wise. At all dinners the guests are exclusively men. Respectable women are never allowed to enter society of any sort. From birth to death they are willing prisoners in their own homes. The only males they are permitted to meet are their brothers, uncles, and the immediate relatives of their husbands. The pleasures derived from the presence of women at a dinner party is not altogether unknown to the mandarins. At the special dinners which take the place of the official when the guests are no longer strangers, they employ professional female dinner attendants. These are young girls of beauty, intelligence, and accomplishments, whose business is to entertain. They sit beside the *convives*, or just behind their chairs, never less than two attendants to each guest. They sip wine, smoke cigarettes, tell amusing stories, fan the guests, and, when the meal is over, sing, play musical instruments, and dance the odd dances of the East. Their music is generally painful to European ears, but their dancing is a delightful mixture of grace and awkwardness, art and grotesquerie. They have a recognized legal status in China, and as a class are quiet, orderly, and very thrifty. They command good prices, receiving from one to ten dollars per performance, according to their beauty and accomplishments.—*Lippincott's Magazine*.

ROSE LEAVES.

BY M. F. HARMAN.

WITH all the other revivals comes that of drying rose leaves for pot-pourri, preserves, etc. In the old times no linen drawer was considered properly furnished without its scent bags of rose leaves and dried lavender, and the preparation of the leaves was always a part of the regular Summer work.

A pot-pourri, if rightly made, will last for years, and an occasional uncovering of the jar will fill a room with a delicate odor which will linger there for hours.

The rose bushes should be visited every day after the sun has dried up the dew, and those which are ready to drop to pieces shaken into a basket. They may then be spread upon a sheet to dry, and if tossed up lightly several times the moisture will soon disappear. Arrange them in layers in a covered bowl,

with a sprinkling of fine salt between each layer, using a proportion of three handfuls of leaves to a small one of salt. Fresh leaves and salt may be added to this for several mornings, and then the whole should stand about ten days, with a thorough stirring up once or twice a day during the interval.

Transfer this stock to a glass fruit-jar, mixing with it two ounces of allspice coarsely ground, and the same of stick cinnamon, broken up. Let it stand two or three weeks closely covered. Now mix with it one ounce of allspice, two ounces of dried lavender flowers, one ounce of cloves, one ounce of stick cinnamon, one nutmeg coarsely grated, two ounces of orris root, bruised and shredded, and a few grains of musk, if that of fine quality is obtainable. A few drops of oil of rose, geranium or violet, may be added at any time, and a little orange flower water also serves to make it sweeter. Now put it in the permanent jar, which should be one with double covers, and every day of the year, if the covers are removed for a few minutes, a delicate fragrance will be given out which will be found refreshing and agreeable. Rose jars in oriental shapes may now be bought for a reasonable sum, and the sizes vary from those holding a pint to the huge ones which stand two or three feet in height. Those in the coarser kinds of Imari ware are probably the least expensive, and in Kaja and Owari they are also within the means of almost every one. Small bags made of silk and filled with rose leaves are much used for sachets, and a rose pillow is a pleasant possession if one has a rose garden which will furnish enough leaves for the purpose.

A tincture of roses is made by filling a wide-mouthed bottle with the leaves and pouring over them pure spirits of wine, as much as the bottle will hold. Cork and allow it to stand several weeks before using.

A scent-sacket for the linen drawer may be made by mixing coriander seed, orris root, lavender flowers, rose leaves and sweet flag, of each one ounce, with one drachm of allspice and the same of mace. Another consists of a mixture of lavender flowers, half a pound.

For all heavy table covers and lambrequins put light draperies of China silk or the cheaper silkoline. A mantel can be gracefully draped with a veil-like lambrequin of Florida moss, held in place on top by the ornaments. If there is a small fire-place, have it cleaned and painted, and keep it filled with the season's flowers or grasses or Egyptian asparagus in jars.